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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the role of self-study and collaboration in action research, focusing on one researcher's doctoral research on the process of studying for a Ph.D. degree in education. The goal of this research is to build case-studies of 19 individuals in England conducting doctoral research. The paper discusses possible techniques for examining the process of studying for a doctoral degree, as well as the development of a model of research as personal development which locates researchers' experiences of doing research in their autobiographies of their learning. It describes the conduct of this research on the Ph.D. process, comparing two researchers' motivations and actions relative to deciding to pursue a Ph.D. Three appendixes provide a timeline, conversation transcript, and inventory of archived data on the relationship between the two researchers and their joint self-study of the Ph.D. process. (Contains 31 references.) (MDM)

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(Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, San Francisco, 1995.)

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Using action research in joint self-study to locate two researchers' experiences within the autobiographies of their learning

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Abstract: *I am an action researcher trying to improve my practice as a researcher. Collaboration is central to the notion of action research along with a focus upon one's own development as a researcher. The paper attempts to show how these two ideas are reflected in my practice and particularly some of the difficulties and pleasures I have encountered in trying to move with one researcher in my study, MP, towards collaborative, joint self-study.*

Aims of this paper:

* To describe my whole project briefly and then to explore the aims of my research; to pinpoint some central issues by looking at one example of a sequence of meetings with MP whereby I hoped we would move towards joint self-study.
* To argue for and against a continuum of styles of research from research 'on', to research 'for', to research 'in', 'with', and 'within'; to explain how this continuum reflects the autobiography of my learning.
* To explore a central theme which concerns my understanding of self-study as problematic and related to a tension between working alone and working with others. To look at my relationship to self as researcher and to others as researchers/co-researchers.
* To present some fragments of analyzed data which record moments in the developing relationship between myself and MP.
* To embed a form of self study in the content, style and form of this paper.
* To show what self study means to me now and what I think it is for.

The theoretical framework of my study: The main theoretical framework which underpins my work is educational action research as described and explained by Lomax (1990, 1991, 1994). I am concerned, after Whitehead (1989, pp41-51) to address the question: How can I improve this process of education here? The process of education I am concerned to improve is my practice as a researcher. Whitehead (1989, p41) sets a possible agenda for my work when he claims that a living educational theory will be produced through systematic reflection on the process of trying to improve one's educational practice which provides: "Insights into the nature of the descriptions and explanations which we would accept as valid accounts of our educational development." Altrichter (1993, p42) asks me to research my research methodology as my enquiry progresses. A consideration of the kinds of description and explanation valid for my work together with a scrutiny of my methods and the rationale for them (the ways in which I arrive at and argue for my descriptions and explanations) are two strong elements which inform my understanding of what self-study is and the purpose it serves.

Work from the constructive alternativist perspective complements my approach by building upon Kelly's (1955) view that we need not be the victims of our biographies. Thomas and Harri-Augstein have developed the idea of self-organised learning and learning conversations (1985) as their own form of action research grounded in Personal Construct Psychology (PCP). Pope and Denicolo (1990, 1994) use repertory grid technique and self-narratives and 'snake' charts as action researchers from a PCP perspective exploring issues in professional/educational development. I have operationalised aspects of the constructive alternativist approach to educational enquiry throughout my study and the work drawnupon in this paper includes the drawing up of two repertory grids and two snake charts and the scrutiny of these particular techniques which emerged when MP and I discussed the process as part of our joint self-study. In other words one aspect of this paper's self-study is that I problematise my use of this approach as Whitehead (op cit) and Altrichter's (op cit) work suggests I should.

Building a theoretical position: My work has also been influenced by a number of important texts: Schratz' (1993) work on qualitative voices in educational research; Schön's (1988) notion of recording stories, attending to our assumptions in our stories, listening to others' version of the 'same events'; Gadamer's (1985) hermeneutical approach to understanding; Usher's (1992) work on reflexivity; Munby and Russell's (1994) notion of the authority of experience; the way in which Hamilton et al (1994) study their own practices in academia; Cole and Knowles' (1994) methodology for self-study grounded in a life-history perspective. This work excited me as it concerns different educational uses for story and narrative and a developing notion of the place of the situated voice in research. I wanted to build upon the interesting work of Clandinin (1989) and Goodson (1992) for example where they explore teacher story. I wished to begin to explore, expose and celebrate some researchers' stories and particularly the stories researchers tell about how their research relates to the rest of their lives as learners. As I read more about my area of enquiry, gather and analyse more data, discuss my work in progress with others and write about it, my own 'story of theory' slowly emerges from my practice as a researcher.

Introducing my research - my broader project: The doctoral research from which this paper is extracted uses an educational action research perspective to explore the experience of studying for a research degree. A small number of central case studies look at the experience of doctoral study within two different institutions and five different faculties of my institution. The study aims to explore what it is like to do a PhD in different settings, using different research paradigms. Questions asked include: what kind of learning is research? What is a PhD for? What is the relevance of doing a PhD in people's working lives? What is valid as PhD research? How does doctoral research fit with the rest of one's life as a learner? What kind of support do researchers benefit from? How can small-scale qualitative research capture, express and usefully inform the diverse experience of individuals studying for the same award? How do research students fit into the culture of a 'new' university? These questions are explored with the aim of improving supervision/support provision/procedures in the future. My current view of the supervision relationship is that the onus is shared between supervisor and researcher to develop a dialogue which improves the researcher's and the supervisor's practice.

Action research is usually conceived of as cyclical movement through stages of planning, acting and evaluating carefully monitored action through reflection. In the planning part of my action research I envisaged a longitudinal study centred around a series of one-to-one in-depth loosely structured interviews with three groups of researchers. The first group was comprised of researchers working in the Faculty of Education at Kingston. The second group was comprised of researchers working in each of the Kingston Faculties. The third group was comprised of educational researchers at another 'older' university. I planned to have three men and three women in each group in order to have a gender balanced sample. I aimed to follow through people at different stages of their enquiries in order to have a diversity of views of the process. I conceived of the groups as distinct in terms of their institutional location (either between faculties or across institutions) and saw the distinctions between them as further reflected in the different areas of their enquiries.

I planned to gather data in the form of snake charts (Lomax and Parker, 1995), repertory grids (Parker, 1993a) and audiotaped conversations held whilst drawing these up. I planned to audiotape loosely structured interviews about the process of doing PhD research. I planned to collect people's writings about their research and audiotape their presentations of aspects of their studies as further documentation of their progress. My own progress was to be monitored in the same ways and I also kept a detailed research journal and have as data draft versions of writing which demonstrate the ways my thoughts and ideas change and develop. I have also drawn concept maps (Novak and Gowin, 1974, p15-54) in order to capture in diagrammatic form some of the relationships between my ideas and to show how these change over time.

My methodological aim is to build case-studies of 19 individuals (including myself) in as much depth as time constraints permit. My findings so far indicate the need for better provision of support for part-time students in particular and for structures within institutions which recognise the diversity of needs and abilities of students pursuing doctoral study.

My first research aim: *To explore the question: How can I improve my practice as a researcher? While asking: What might I learn that could be of benefit to others?*

This aim is very 'action researchy' in that it adopts a question put forward by Whitehead (1989, p41-51). I see the second part of the question, concerned with what good I might do, or the use value of my research to others, as particularly influenced by Lomax (1986, p49) writing about the importance of acknowledging one's educational values. As I work in close contact with Lomax and Whitehead they have been of primary influence in my formulation of an understanding of action research. When I first thought about how to carry out research on my own practice, it seemed obvious to choose to focus upon my research practice. The alternative would have been to focus upon my teaching and this was a much smaller proportion of my working life. This first aim was the foundation for my other two aims and also led me to develop my rationale in the way that I did at that time. There was not much literature available which described the research process from a personal standpoint. Much of the writing had an objective tone and it was not easy to empathise with the researcher as an individual. Nor did one learn what it felt like to do research. I wanted my action research to expose as a real world activity the process of studying for a research degree. I also wanted to use action research to help me to become a more proficient researcher.

How do I expose the process of studying for a research degree? I imagine that I can expose the process of study for a research degree by asking questions of the following kind. Is the experience of study for a research degree obviously and significantly different for different people? Do people have different rates of movement through the stages? What are the stages that people identify as important in their work? Are the hurdles that we have to jump through different according to which institution we study in? The simple way in which I intend to do this is to ask people who are at different stages in the process to share their experience with me. People in my study are at particular points in the stories of their doctorates, some had just embarked on the formulation of a research proposal when I met them; others were almost at the stage of writing up their theses. At the beginning of my study, because it was the first official hurdle which I had to jump, I had questions about the registration process. I wondered whether the process of registration was the same in the two institutions in my study. I hypothesized that there might be different experiences of the registration procedure for action researchers in my institution, for researchers who use different paradigms in my institution and for researchers who have registered in the other institution in my study.

What would show that I had become a more proficient researcher? One way in which I think it would be clear if I have improved my practice is that I might become more able to express my research questions clearly. I might get more fluent about what I am doing in order to expose my work to criticism and support from others.

Another way might be more personal and less easy for others to judge, I might become more able to stand in a different relation to my work. I might be able to assume an outside stance in order to protect and develop the part of my self which is inside the research process. I might be able to take into my own practice an awareness, for example, that everybody struggles at different points in the process, everybody sometimes finds it hard to express themselves or to know where their ideas are heading. I might be able to protect the vulnerable researcher part of myself from some of the pain of confusion. Perhaps in Berne's (1961,pp194-195) terms I could develop an 'adult' researcher self who can look after my 'child' researcher self and comfort her when she feels lost and worried? Maybe this could become an important aspect of my self-study? If one researcher self protected the other then I'd be better able to express myself when I feel threatened and uncertain in order to move to the next stage of my work.

As well as asking the participants in my study to use the metaphors I suggest to map their thinking about the experience of doing their Phds I can learn from the metaphors others use about the research process. I particularly like one which a supervisor in my study used of the PhD as a string of beads. One moves around the circle of each bead from a state of darkness and confusion to a state of clarity and conviction which helps one to move onto the next bead and the next period of dismay and readaptation. When I feel that I am in the dark I could be comforted if I remind myself that I've been here before and it does get

psychology was. I remember being delighted by Rogers' optimism about human nature (seduced by his form of humanism?) and dismayed by his blindness to the fact that he was a powerful white male authority figure (disillusioned by his gender/authority blind stance?). I now build on to the dismay part of that equation a worry about his work which I got from Robbins' (1988, p167) critique. Robbins criticizes Rogers for maintaining an inherently illogical position, Rogers works from within a particular set of social and political conditions, considers that society needs to change towards his more person centred and ultimately apolitical philosophy yet acknowledges that his work has been permitted if not encouraged by the very setting he deplores. This question is much too big for me to consider now but I do not want to ignore it for the future and so I want to write it here and return to it later outside the context of this paper. It is relevant here because it shows the beginning of my development of an understanding of some of the constraints affecting myself and MP due to our situatedness in a particular institution within a certain society.

My third research aim: *To explore this model by investigating the experiences of researchers working in a diversity of paradigms and compare them with my own experience.*

Prior to completing my research proposal I had completed a repertory grid (Kelly, 1955) in order to explore my constructs about research and learning. I will comment again upon the use of repertory grid later but would like to focus now on how doing this grid influenced my third research aim. The grid showed a marked contrast and tension between learning in groups and learning alone. This did not show up as a contrast between how I conceived of research and learning. Rather it ran as a thread throughout the conversation when I was sorting out the elements (individual events and people) and constructs (over-arching ideas) of the grid. I decided to mirror my tension between working alone and working in groups in the aims of my PhD. I would try to explore and expose my own (alone) experiences and compare them with others' (together), thereby drawing disparities into a coherent model. This decision led me to conceive of my PhD as being about studying similarity and difference across experiences. The experiences all have the same name 'studying for a PhD' and yet they are diverse. I wanted to capture some of the essence of PhD research and to show how it is a different experience for different people.

My concrete objectives which relate to this third aim: Carrying out sequences of interviews and loosely structured conversations with a diversity of researchers is my way of operationalising this third aim. Because action research demands that I focus upon myself by looking at my own practice I believe it is particularly important to foreground the voices of others in my research. Schratz (1993) has raised the issue of whose voice is heard in research accounts. One difficulty with my work is that it is much easier to generate data about myself than it is to solicit others' views with the same frequency and in the same depth. I hope that the fact that there are so many others in my work will act as a counter-balance and dialectic to my own understanding, assumptions and prejudices. One important strand of this paper is that it tries to show some of the reality of trying to compare my work with that of one other researcher. Central to my work is the study of myself as an action researcher, but this work means little without comparison to the work of others. It is difficult however to build a rich enough collaborative relationship to be really able to enter into and share the experiences of the other researchers in my study. At first I was worried about imposing my work on others' studies, now I am more worried that it is much harder to establish the collaborative part of my action research than I had imagined. When I "imagine a solution to my problem" as Whitehead's action planner suggests (Whitehead, 1985 p98) I encounter a particular difficulty. The reality of my lived out solution does not match up to my imagined solution. This difficulty occurs because my original imagined solution took place in an ideal situation where I thought we would have more opportunity for meeting and an easier path towards collaboration. At the stage of planning my work I had not yet lived through some of the thinking and action struggles which I have now experienced. I simply did not realise how difficult it would be to realize my aims both for practical reasons and because I would have to absorb and adjust to new ways of thinking as I attempted to construct a new researcher self.

Encountering problems in living out the action: When I tried to act upon my plans and move my research into the next stage of the cycle from planning to action I encountered some problems. I found it difficult

better eventually. Each bead is both different from the preceding and later beads and similar in form to them. Each bead contains a yin and yang pattern of harmony through contrast between knowing and not knowing. But as Sanger (1995, p94) points out metaphors are not unproblematic representations of reality, in Derrida's terms they can leak meanings. The string of beads is a string of discrete objects which are connected by a thread, the metaphor expresses resolution of conflict between the aspects within the beads but also expresses inherent unconnectedness between the phases of research.

My concrete objectives which relate to this first aim: I hope that I will learn to express where I am in my research at a given moment. I hope to be able to continue to progress by forgiving myself when I have not moved ahead fast. I hope to be able to use my methodology to capture and pass on some of the enthusiasm and excitement which the researchers in my study express about their work, as well as the points of difficulty and struggle.

My second research aim: *To develop a model of research as personal development which locates researchers' experiences of doing research in their autobiographies of their learning.*

I developed this aim because I was puzzled as to what sort of learning research is and how this fits with the rest of one's life as a learner. I was interested to see that although there is a rich literature concerning the stories teachers tell about their lives as learners and teachers, there is no equally rich literature concerning our lives as researchers. I hypothesized that one's view of how research is located in the rest of one's learning will influence one's attitudes to doing research and this will further influence the kind of experience one has when researching. I already had an interest in the construction of the self through writing. I was fascinated by the differences between the ways in which the self is revealed and produced through different genres of writing. This extant interest developed out of my studies in literature and psychology. I knew that I would have to find a research question which would continue to absorb me for a sustained period. I wanted to develop an educational question which built upon my existing enthusiasms.

My concrete objectives which relate to this second aim: I aim to collect people's stories about their lives as learners and to see how their doctoral research fits into these stories. One way of doing this is to ask for them to produce snake charts which are diagrams of key moments or significant events in their lives as learners. Another way is to elicit repertory grids about central concepts concerning doctoral research and learning. These two ways map conversations about research and learning but they also move the analysis away from personal meanings by imposing particular shapes and structures onto the accounts of our lived experience as researchers. As I hear the different stories I hope that a model of research as either a distinct form of learning which differs from previous experiences or a similar form of learning to past experiences will emerge from the stories. I imagine eventually having a model which has a shape but I have no idea what the shape will look like yet.

A central problem with this aim: I worried about this aim almost from the outset. I wrote about one aspect of this worry (Parker, 1993b) and want to return to it now. I would like to turn the meaning of this aim upside down because I am concerned about eliding the boundaries between the ideas which underpin my research. I am worried that in philosophical terms I may have made a 'category mistake' (Ryle, 1971 p138-139). I now believe that it is important for me to separate out the categories of learning, research and personal development. I was concerned about this when I came across Robbins (1988) work. He gives a cogent exposition of the political importance of the philosophical stance one takes in thinking about an issue. I believe this is particularly important for me in becoming an action researcher. I do not want to argue that learning = research = personal development. I believe it is important to separate out the three ideas and forms of action and being from each other. Self-study can help me with this if I can understand that I have different selves who carry out the different ways of being. This idea has an echo for me of Robbins' (1988, p172-5) call for an interaction between life worlds and system worlds in the educational context. I do not understand this work yet but I have the feeling that it will become important to me. I know I need to understand more about the history of ideas as political, I am just beginning to realize how decontextualized, how abstracted from action and context my notion of different epistemologies that I developed when studying

to adhere fully to my timetable. Reality intervened in the shape of the 'messy real world of practice' (Griffiths, 1990 p43) and I found I had little time to pursue my own enquiry and the other researchers I wanted to meet were equally busy. I became disheartened when I found that I had not progressed at the pace I had foreseen. It took me a while to realize that my timetable need not be seen as written in stone. I did not have to be depressed about failing to keep up with my plans, but should recognise that it is important to keep going and hold on to my aims.

I had a further, more important problem to do with the way I defined my PhD to myself. I saw the study as having to run along the lines of my proposal. I found it difficult to keep the boundaries of research and 'not research' clear. I wanted only to include data which had been gathered using my planned methods from those people with whom I had originally intended to work. Sometimes researchers approached me and wanted to discuss their work and I was reluctant to include this new and unforeseen data within my PhD. An attendant problem concerned the difficulty of establishing good collaboration between myself and those with whom I wanted to work within my PhD. We work in different places so that there are practical and time constraints upon the frequency and quality of our meetings. More significantly, it can be difficult to establish dialogue across different research paradigms.

Is there a continuum of research styles relevant to my work? I would like to argue for a continuum from research 'on' to research 'for' to research 'with', 'in' and 'within'. This continuum is reflected in the autobiography of my own learning as a researcher. I moved from research which looked at others' behaviours (research on) to research which looked at others' behaviours in order to bring about an improvement in their understanding (research for) to collaborative action research where I ask with others how we might improve our practice (research with, in and within). The need for me to create this continuum at this stage in my work mirrors and reflects my need to separate out the categories of learning, personal development and research. As my research journey continues I may find that the distinction between sorts of research on my putative continuum and types of activity in my three categories is not something I need to maintain. It feels as though I need it now to straighten out my thinking. I realise that this will probably change in the future. This realisation is in line with my idea of the dynamic and lived qualities of action research. I believe that the action researcher only ever reaches tentative and provisional conclusions. Even as I reach a moment of resolution the next set of dilemmas and contradictions are looming ahead.

The implications of some of my methods: Critical questioning from the action research 'community' and the broader educational community has helped me to problematise some of my methods as the enquiry progresses. Some of the difficulties I have encountered have been practical as mentioned above. More important difficulties have been philosophical or epistemological. There continues to be a tension between the rather traditional empiricist structure to my work and my attempt to do something new and embrace a different perspective. In trying to capture and record experience there is always the difficulty that the recording is somewhat arbitrary. I can only obtain snapshots of particular moments. Using snake charts imposes a particular metaphor on the researchers in my study. Trying to dig out people's own metaphors is a longer and potentially more valuable process. Using repertory grid causes me to have problems with the use of a seemingly quantitative method of recording qualitative data. Some of the problems in giving representative accounts of action research which I discuss with Lomax (Lomax and Parker op cit) also apply to representing other forms of research.

Changing the focus of my enquiry: Initially I was interested in capturing and recording both full and part-time PhD students' experiences. As my work progressed I became more concerned with the plight of the part-time researcher. This is not just because I am one myself, but more because financial support for educational researchers who work full-time as teachers is dwindling rapidly. I am interested that if we are to develop a new sense of the typical research student, as argued by Salmon (1994) for example, we should recognize the particular needs of part-time research student. I am also interested in finding out which forms of educational support the students in my enquiry are receiving and how effective these supports are in helping them to see their work through to successful completion. It was always my intention that if anyone

dropped out of my study because they were abandoning their MPhil/Phds that I would try and find out why this was. In line with this intention I have followed up the only person who has dropped out and interviewed her about her reasons. In presenting a report on an aspect of my work last year I was asked whether one of the things I was doing was to find out how to provide a better form of PhD experience for the future. This concern to improve a situation is central to action research. At first I did not feel brave enough to say this but I now admit that what I want is to provide some information which is used to improve PhD support at least in my own institution.

Carrying out my plans: I carried out a series of interviews with the researchers in my study. The first interview in each sequence was centred around the production of a snake chart (Lomax and Parker, 1995). This technique plots thinking as an annotated diagram which moves across the page in curving lines (hence the use of the snake metaphor). The curves are drawn between critical incidents or key moments in the drawers' life which they choose as relating to the interviewer's first focussing question. The questions that I asked at the initial interviews were: "What led you to do your PhD" and "How does this fit with the rest of your life as a learner?". I explained that I wanted them to tell me their versions of their lives as learners, not to begin at a point suggested by me, nor to feel constrained to describe either people, places or events as forming critical turning points. I obtained data in the form of snake charts and audiotapes of the conversations we had when drawing up the charts.

Working with MP an account of our first research conversation: At first MP and I talked very informally about our research and our working lives. I think we needed to do this to build some sort of a relationship together. I felt that I could not capture all of this talk as data as it would have distorted the beginning of our relationship by formalising our talk. However we did learn from our conversation that we had things in common as research assistants which affected our experiences as researchers on our PhDs. Neither of us has much time as part-time students to pursue our studies. We both tend to ignore our studies when they are at difficult points and to immerse ourselves in what we can do in our day to day working lives. We like to make ourselves useful in our departments and sometimes use this as a way of avoiding moving ahead in our PhDs. MP's snake chart (Fig 1 below) reveals this problem when he says 'started work on PhD, find it conflicts with job, no time to play, now I need structure, this is against my nature'. He saw the next curve of his snake as being concerned with a 'start to get organised, resolve conflict'.

I had just been describing my work and MP said he was interested in the possibility of using action research to impose a structure on his work. MP says: "(T169) When I first did my proposal I didn't have a methodology as such, now I'm developing a picture, a structure, but a lot of that is being imposed by my role as a research assistant here or by the needs of my job: to turn out certain bits of software or to look at ways of doing certain things and I can see that is going to have an effect on how my degree is going to go in the next few years, so yes I think it is developing but I just wish I'd had a clearer idea at the start". He went on to say that he might use some of my methods in order to clarify his progress to himself, he was interested in the notion of keeping a research journal.

Do our choices of areas for doctoral study reflect the autobiographies of our learning? MP's research concerns the development of a computer assisted learning package for Music which will be a curriculum resource for initial teacher education students. His research builds upon his experience as a musician and as a computer programmer. My research is perhaps more abstract and builds upon my educational background as a student of psychology and English literature. How do we build a relationship together as co-researchers self-studying our different practices together? What data has emerged in our work so far which supports my hypothesis that the experiences one has as a learner before one embarks upon doctoral study will colour one's experiences when studying for a research degree?

Drawing up and comparing snake charts: At our first meeting, I introduced myself and described my research aims to MP, briefly showed him my snake chart and then asked him to draw up a snake chart in response to the questions "What led you to do your PhD" and "How does this fit with the rest of your life as a learner". The snake chart is an annotated diagram which depicts the key moments, turning points and

influences informing an action. MP's snake chart shows his autobiography of his learning which led him to start his PhD.

FIG 1 MP's snake chart

MP's snake chart moves through his history of his schooling and picks up particular people who were influential along the way. He depicts the development of an interest in Music and in computer technology which two strands of interest are reflected in his choice of an area of enquiry for his PhD.

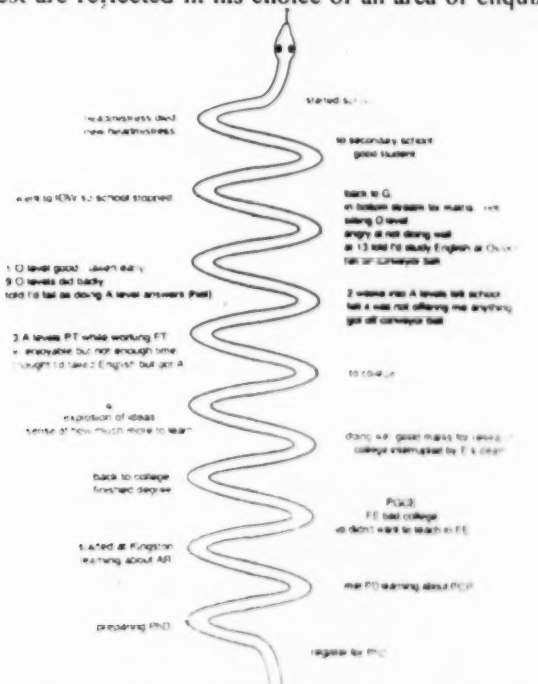

FIG 2 My snake chart

My snake chart, on the other hand, although it also moves through my history of my schooling, does not focus on particular subjects studied and it is much less clear from it how I might come to choose this

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particular area of enquiry.

This contrast raises an issue about my methodology. What is comparable about our two different snake charts? How do I account for difference across individuals' accounts of a nominally similar experience? From the outset of my enquiry I was concerned to capture moments of experience, or more realistically perhaps, moments of thinking about aspects of experience. The difficulty with this very qualitative approach lies in how to depict the richness of lived experience. A parallel difficulty is discussed by Lomax and Parker (1995) which considers the problematic of representing action research.

Comparing my repertory grid and MP's repertory grid: Repertory grid technique has been used in a variety of settings (Parker, 1993) to chart the key elements in people's thinking about an issue. MP and I both drew repertory grids about aspects of our PhDs. MP drew up his around the question which I'd asked about at our first meeting when he generated his snake chart: what led you to do your PhD and how does this fit with the rest of your life as a learner. I drew mine up around the differences and similarities between research and learning. What did these grids show about our thinking?

We fed our rep grids into a computer for analysis and then talked about the results: (MPN714 notes from our discussion on analyzed rep grids) "I think I was looking at how the program worked as it progressed and fitting my responses into the computer program". This quote raises another issue about my methodology: why did I not ask MP about the process at the time? How meaningful are the results of his focused grid when he raises issues about the process as he looks back at it?

I have decided not to reproduce our grids here for reasons of space and because the results we obtained were not satisfactory in our view. I could write a whole paper about the process of eliciting and discussing our grids but now I just want to problematise the process briefly within the context of MP and my developing our relationship as co-researchers. We found that it was not the artefact of the grid which was useful to us as a mapping of our conversation, rather it was the understandings of each others' views about our research which we reached during the conversations in preparing our grids and critiquing them together.

When I presented my work recently to a group of research students I was asked the question why I want to continue to work with methodological tools which I do not feel are really fitting my purpose. I answered that I wish to explore why these tools do not do want I want them to: they do not communicate what the experience of doing research at doctoral level is like for the researchers in my study. I hope that through exploring my techniques like this I, together with my co-researchers can develop better ways of capturing our experiences in order to communicate them to others and to improve the process of our PhD studies.

Recalling our most recent talk together: When this paper was in draft form MP and I met to discuss it and our research together. As at our first meeting, this was an informal, unrecorded conversation. Immediately afterwards I wrote the following account of how I saw the key issues which had emerged.

What has just happened between us? MP looked through my draft paper and I asked him to confirm or disagree with my words in the places where I has said 'we'. For example he said he had nothing against my saying that we both wished for our teaching to be informed by our research practice.There are some moments in our talk which I identify as particularly important bits out of the whole of the data which MP and I have generated together. For example we are only now in conversation clarifying some of the differences in our attitudes to our PhDs. Through talking to MP I am clearer now about how I chose my research questions as a way of building on what I was already interested in. I am also clearer that I felt constrained by the Research Degree Committee's scrutiny of my proposal. This made me feel I had to imagine concrete ways of showing what our experiences are like for us. MP says he fell into his PhD and didn't choose it as of particular interest to him, he likes his practical work and does not feel really engaged by his research. He sees his research as an intellectual exercise which has no real point for him. I begin to wonder whether my enthusiasm is partly to do with the freedom of trying to do action research rather than MP's more traditional research approach. MP talks about the difference between his work and his research:

(MPN953) "I see the research as having to be much more clean and clear than my work [producing computer packages], I feel as though I have to account for myself retrospectively in my research and leave out a lot of the little questions and problems which I come across and solve every day".

What has this paper to do with teacher education? This study involves me as a learner self-studying how my practice as a researcher can be improved and working with one other researcher to explore how we might improve our shared and different practices together. The action research approach which I take is grounded in the teacher researcher movement. Work such as that by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) has informed my understanding from the outset of this enquiry. I went to their writing when I wanted to understand more about the relationship between theory and practice in teacher research. I believe that there is a reflexive relationship between research which informs practice and practice which informs theory. Our work is located rather peripherally in teacher education because we are both employed primarily as researchers (research assistants). This job description limits the amount of teaching we are permitted to do as teacher educators. However, we both do teach teachers for part of our working week and hope that our practice as teachers/lecturers/facilitators is informed by the thinking we do as researchers. Is there a clear relationship between teaching and research? How do we know whether our research is really informing our teaching? It is not possible for our research to focus primarily on our more minimal roles as teacher educators but nor is it possible to separate out fully the two roles of teacher and researcher. Perhaps our work may eventually throw some light upon the question of how research can underpin and inform our teaching?

A central contradiction within this paper: Whitehead (1989, pp44-45) raises the issue of resolving living contradictions between one's values and one's practice. This alerts me to the fact that there is a tricky contradiction in this paper. I wanted to describe the process of becoming collaborative with one other researcher but I am writing this paper alone. I am concerned that I am taking MP's words and silencing his voice. This is very uncollaborative and poses a problem for my self study. I have checked with him whilst this paper was being written that what I have said is acceptable to him, but the paper moves on and changes and there comes a point where I take his words and frame them in my meanings. I think it is partly this contradiction between wanting to work collaboratively and having to work alone in describing our collaboration that has been a factor in making this paper very hard for me to write. The words of Woods (1985, p85) keep coming to mind "Researchers must be masochists. We must confront the pain barrier until it hurts.". I would like to understand more about why my research is so painful and yet continually absorbing. I think the reason for my continuing enthusiasm for my work lies in the discovery of new perspectives which come from my own insights and through dialogue with the other researchers in my study and in the critical community here at Kingston. The self study of my work is done in a different way to my descriptions of MP's self-study, I cannot stand far enough away from myself and yet I stand too far from MP in this text. When MP and I talked about this paper we agreed that in an ideal world we would have written it together. I am distressed that I have to write alone about our collaboration. It would have had a better symmetry if I had written about MP and he had written about me, that way we could have had enough distance to evaluate each others' work and we could have turned our evaluations of each other back upon ourselves in a form of reflexive critical friendship. I suppose that since my research is trying to argue for more resources for part-time students and recognition of our plight as fully employed on other things than our own research, perhaps I would have been undercutting my own arguments if MP and I had been thoroughly satisfied with the progress of our work together so far.

A concluding critique: I think that there is a central confusion which emerges in my self study in this paper. I have not started from a clearly set out explicit value position which would give me another way of studying myself as I write. I have felt that I stand too far from MP and yet I think I have not yet revealed enough about myself. This leaves a lack of central integrity and cohesion in the form of this paper. Yet it is exactly this sense of possible integration of aspects of a learner self with a lived self with a researcher self which makes me want to continue on a journey towards becoming a better researcher. I hope that you can help me to find a better way forward.

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Appendix One

Indicative timeline to show some principal events involving MP:

April 1993 rang MP, introduced myself and we met for lunch, he agreed to be involved in my PhD

1.6.93 I attended music research colloquium where MP presented his work (I did this was in order to learn about his research and to gain a beginning of an understanding of music research in general).

15.6.93 MPSC1 - MP drew up snake chart in an interview, Appendix Two relates.

7.7.93 MP presented paper on his work at PSM conference (regional conference for British Educational Research Association) arranged by Pam and me et al.

12.11.93 Met MP to describe repertory grid process and ask him to prepare by reflecting on his autobiography/story of his learning by picking out key events/influences/ideas in his schooling.

22.9.93 MP presented work on CAL (computer assisted learning) to our education whole school staff development day.

22.11.93 MPRG1 - MP drew up Repertory Grid of the principal influences, events and ideas which affected his schooling and led to his PhD.

5.2.94 Music research colloquium - MP presented latest work on CAL.

24.3.94 Met MP lunch, took him book I had found on multimedia and education, feedback conversation about repertory grid interview.

27.5.94 Met MP informal interview.

14.6.94 Met MP redrew Repertory grid together.

21.6.94 met MP to talk informally about our progress.

30.6.94 Music research colloquium - I was invited to present an introduction to action research, MP attended and presented his recent work on CAL.

21.9.94 Saw MP playing at Hatchards reception.

14.3.95 Met MP for lunch to discuss this paper in progress.

Indicative extract of conversation between me an MP when drawing up his snake chart

[After describing my research project, I had shown him my snake chart and talked it through]

MP: So let me get this straight, things down one side are a change
ZP: [interrupting] No they are just the kinks, so one kink goes one way and the other goes the other way.
MP: So it's not the case where a kink is a change and something else is a state of..
ZP: No you can put the change and then perhaps something about what it felt like if you want to.
MP: Right.
ZP: I suppose its about identifying what it feels like to do research some of the feelings would have been handy but I don't expect people to share the feelings, I don't think they have to (unintelligible) they don't have to talk about their feelings if they don't want to. I mean I don't want it to be like a therapy thing. I mean I just noticed these things, it was funny I hadn't thought about significant people's deaths and how they had a practical effect on my schooling, it's probably that there's patterns that you don't notice until you write them down. Because when I did my conference things I discovered that I went to a conference at eight and I'd completely forgotten that and that my family were active in research and stuff and I'd forgotten it all. I'd forgotten that I had ideas about research as a child, it wasn't until I had to do the construct thing, significant events about research and learning that I discovered all these early things, I suppose that makes it worth doing because I suppose I know something now about why I chose to do this, because it does feel very very masochistic at times doesn't it sort of impossible, impossible to do it well enough...do you want to have a go?
MP: Let's get some paper you'll have to draw the snake
ZP: You could do it on the computer couldn't you, I don't know I think you start with the head and then you just do it as you go along, I mean yours might be different from mine, that other one has got a pattern..that looks like a head doesn't it? [drawing the head of the snake]
MP: Yes that's nice.
ZP: Right so it's learning and research then.
MP: So the first thing I would say is that, oh dear I'm not saying this in a way that you'll be able to write down very easily, but influenced by my dad into learning different sciences especially electronics and he also did a lot of his learning by himself, he had some sort of disease when he was young and laid on his back for a year and did a lot of reading and therefore he sort of taught himself everything he knew from books and I think I sort of picked up on that and that's something that I do myself. And I am very proud about the things that I have learnt for myself and it means that I am not very open to being taught or going to somebody for help on something, I'd much rather find out for myself
ZP: Finding my own?
MP: What? oh finding my own erm
ZP: Discovery?
MP: Yes personal sort of
ZP: Discovery? Well have you got a time for that or not, were you at school there?
MP: Primary, ok so then I was at secondary school, I was in my second year and there was a new music teacher started who I built up a fairly close friendship with which was frowned upon by many people and she encouraged me in a very positive way to take up music and experiment and up till then I thought my path had always led along scientific leanings and this was a very nice way to do something else. I spent a lot of time doing that and she pushed me through a lot of theory grades and things like that, I managed to get fairly proficient, I suppose, in a short space of time
ZP: So the change was like from electronics and science which came from your dad to adding in music?
MP: Yes, definitely.
ZP: So I'll put change from science and electronics only to music
MP: Yes, yup. Then erm I suppose we get to A levels, making a choice about A levels perhaps then at school (unintelligible) around this sort of area, just after this I started getting interested in computers, erm which was another thing that sort of led on from my dad's interests, but it became something which was very much my own. My dad wasn't that interested in it so I did sort of specialise in it and erm we didn't sort of have any computer games so I never played with anything other than programs I suppose so computers basically (laughs).
ZP: So we've got to there?
MP: Yes. So when I got to a levels I found that I was very interested in computers, I hadn't done anything about it early on in school but they let me do A level computer science anyway so that..
ZP: Oh so school hadn't fitted with your home self-developed things?
MP: No because my dad had always sort of learnt for himself, I feel that I'd learnt most of the things that I'd learnt by myself or through this music teacher who was doing something slightly different.
ZP: So now you brought it back into school?
MP: Well sort of, I mean at the time I wasn't really, I didn't like school, I didn't really fit in with my peers, erm I found it easier to be er a little sort of strange and distant than I did to fit in with the other people round me and that, music helped me with that a little bit and so I posted myself away with the other musicians at school and everybody thought I was a bit weird and a bit of a freak, so I felt very distant from school. I didn't really, I used to skive quite a lot

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ZP: So you, did you say you did an A level involving computers?
MP: Yes that's right, and music and I also did physics, I suppose this is relevant because I started doing physics and maths and realised I'd taken on too much and ended up dropping maths and physics, which was a bit of a shock from what I was expected to be good at.
ZP: That's another kink then isn't it, that's the A level music and the computers and then there's a kink when you dropped the maths and physics
MP: Yes
ZP: Were you surprised as well here?
MP: Erm yes I think I probably was, I'd always expected to try and keep physics on and I just realised that it wasn't interesting me any more, is this the kind of thing that we should put on?
ZP: I don't see why not do you?
MP: It's all relevant to where I am now.
ZP: Yes.
MP: When I came to apply to universities and colleges not only did I find that I was a sort of an A level down really, but also that I wanted, I really wanted to keep going with both the computers and the music. So I tried applying to various places to do joint honours in those and I found that because of the A level I didn't have (unintelligible) quite important and so I ended up here doing music and technology, it was the first year of the course. It wasn't publicised and it wasn't really in the prospectus, so it was a bit of an unknown quantity and I took it really because I'd copped out of all my other options, I was quite desparate really. erm
ZP: So it didn't feel like a particularly positive choice?
MP: No it was a bit of a last ditch attempt
ZP: Amazing isn't it?
MP: It is really and it's worked out very well erm is that another kink?
ZP: So that's how you felt then, you felt that it was your last chance, can I put that?
MP: Yes you can certainly.
ZP: You flunked your entrance finals for other colleges?
MP: Yes..(pause) I suppose my time at Kingston really turned out to be very good, the course really suited me quite nicely, I'd always been interested in ways of integrating music and technology of sorts, electronics and stuff, erm but the main thing was I suppose when I came to my third year and I specialised in a large project, some of the staff here specifically JH and DW who worked at G, who you met at that seminar, started some work in computer aided learning and they encouraged me to do my third year project on that and suddenly I was back in the computer bracket again
ZP: mmm
MP: And erm at the same time JH realised that this was something which would really be worth further study and set up the ADF project and wanted a research assistant and the job was really sort of made to measure for me
ZP: Shall I put that?
MP: Yes that should be another kink really
ZP: Made to measure
MP: for me really because I'd already spent a year working on the project (unintelligible) and it was great because it suited my needs, it was something I wanted to do, both programming and be still involved in music
ZP: (unintelligible)
MP: Yes that really is very important...and I don't know where we are now, there isn't a change but the state that I am now, I can probably say something along the lines of
ZP: Well it is a bit of a change in terms of registering for your phd
MP: Yes well that's right, that's right and finding not only the job but the phd is imposing or trying to impose structures on, on what I am interested in
ZP: I mean you've started looking at it, you've registered?
MP: I'm registered yup
ZP: And you've started the work?
MP: Well in a very sort of unstructured way
ZP: And do you find it conflicts with your job?
MP: Yes.
ZP: You see I wanted to do research assistant and research students but there weren't enough of them here
MP: Really?
ZP: I think it would be difficult (unintelligible)
MP: Right.
ZP: And also it would cut down my sample considerably
MP: yes [interlude of chatting re my project, difficulties if I'd compared res assts and students]
ZP: So registered and starting and finding it conflicts with your job
MP: And also my tendency generally to just sort of knock about and experiment with..
ZP: Your phd interferes with that?
(MP: Yes because generally I am quite a lazy person and I like just messing about and experimenting for myself and I am finding now that I don't have the time to do that
ZP: For playing?

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MP: Yes and that erm that I've really got to start learning from other people and generally structuring the way I work and pushing myself to achieve goals, it's against my nature really.
ZP: But you did want to do it or is that part of the job?
MP: Did want to do what?
ZP: The phd.
MP: Yes well, yes I'd like the phd.
ZP: And you have to do it don't you?
MP: Yes I have to do it as part of the job, but yes I quite like the idea of it, it's just that in order to do something worthwhile I'm actually finding that I have to change the way I work.
ZP: It's a shame to feel you've got to work against your nature isn't it?
MP: It is.
ZP: It sounds a bit dodgy.
MP: It is, I keep rationalising and sort of saying
ZP: Well if you say you are working against yourself then you'll, you are really going to be stuck aren't you because there's no way of going forward
MP: Yes that's right yes that's right you are right - it really is just a question of finding a part of me that would work in that way
ZP: So I've put, we're stopping here where you've found it's a conflict and it's against your nature and I suppose we could say we are waiting for the next kink
MP: The next bit would be really getting myself organised I think
ZP: And resolve the conflict?
MP: Yes.
ZP: Start to get organised to resolve the conflict shall I put?
MP: Yes, how does that look?
ZP: Very funny I'll do it neat (unintelligible) but I think what's funny is that one could write reams about every bit because it sort of expands and that's quite interesting, especially if we do it again when you've gone on a while because it would be interesting to look at what's different and seeing what you do think over time, so maybe if we start at the end then.
MP: It might be necessary to go back a couple of kinks, perhaps if you know if I do get myself more organised I can look back and be more honest about why there was a conflict in the first place, I don't know
ZP: mmm I mean are you being appraised as well?
MP: Not now no.
ZP: Oh I'm being appraised (unintelligible)
MP: Well this is another thing that I am quite conscious of that because of my nature and because I like to just generally mess about and wallow about in a bit of everything that I am interested in learning for myself, there's nobody here really who appraises me or watches over the way I work to make sure that I actually achieve anything and it doesn't seem to be a problem with anybody if I do, you know play about on my computers, erm
ZP: It's difficult to have that sort of freedom then, you've got a different problem from me
MP: I like it and I think I need it but at the same time there's something in me which wishes that there was somebody saying well you know you've got to get on with this that and the other

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Appendix Three

Indicative catalogue of archived data concerning MP

Audiotaped conversations when carrying out more formal interviews, eg drawing up repertory grids, snake charts and discussing these retrospectively

Transcripts and annotations to the above

Journal entries concerning our meetings

Snake chart and initial analyses

Repertory grids, computer analyses of these

Examples of papers MP has delivered

Notes taken whilst listening to Mp's presentations of his work